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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (02/25): THE IMPORTANCE OF
PALESTINIAN RECONCILIATION

Main Stories:

Al Quds leads with statements by a State Department spokesman confirming that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will attend the Gaza reconstruction conference in Egypt and will visit Israel and the West Bank on March 3 and 4. Reporting notes that the purpose of Clinton's visit is to express support for the Palestinian Authority and President Abbas. Al Ayyam also frontpages the report and adds that U.S. envoy George Mitchell will start a second Middle East "tour", visiting Turkey and then the Palestinian Territories and Israel in an effort, "within the framework of President Obama's policy," to seek peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

The three papers run a front page AFP report on statements by a White House spokesperson stating that the letter sent by Hamas to President Obama through Senator Kerry, is still at the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem that is reviewing it. The three papers also run a DPA story quoting a State Department official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, confirming that U.S. envoy George Mitchell will open a permanent office in Jerusalem. In other White House news, Al Ayyam's front page runs a Reuters story quoting anonymous U.S. officials stating that President Obama intends to withdraw troops from Iraq over the next 19 months.

Al Ayyam leads with statements by Fatah Central Committee member Nabil Sha'ath stating in Cairo that a Fatah-Hamas meeting was held on February 24 and that a second meeting will be held to iron out remaining obstacles before the official reconciliation conference opens on February 25. The opening day ceremonial event will be followed by meetings of specialized committees for 3 to 4 days, according to reporting. The report appears in all front pages. Al Hayat Al Jadida leads with a report on Palestinian reactions to a recent decision by the Israeli Jerusalem municipality to demolish the Bustan neighborhood in East Jerusalem to make way for a public

park. All front pages report on a joint Islamic-Christian call to designate February 27 as a day, "to express Arab and Islamic anger" over the Israeli decision and show support for, "Palestinian Jerusalemites." Reporting adds that Jordan has warned Israel of negative consequences of the decision. The three papers also report that a tour of the Bustan neighborhood was conducted by officials from Palestinian Authority President Abbas' office for foreign diplomats. Al Quds notes that the U.S. Consul General did not participate in the tour. Finally, Al Ayyam's front page cites Reuters in quoting Israeli Jerusalem municipal sources denying the demolition plans.

Al Quds quotes Palestinian Authority Premier Fayyad on its front page deeming Israeli settlement expansion as a serious threat to the peace process. Meanwhile, Al Ayyam's front page runs an AFP report quoting Israeli President Peres telling the Knesset that peace with the Palestinians is the most important challenge before Israel. He also urged the Knesset to work towards achieving peace with the Palestinians before the end of their four-year term.

Al Quds runs an inside report revealing that the Israeli Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barakat requested in a February 24 meeting with U.S. Consul General Walles that the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv be moved to Jerusalem. The report adds that the Palestinian Authority Premier Fayyad's advisor Hatem Abdul Qader commented on the Israeli request by describing it as provocative and coming at a time when Israel is committing the extensive ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Jerusalemites.

An Al Quds' inside report cites the Israeli daily Jerusalem Post in reporting on concerns by "American" Jews over possible tension in U.S.-Israeli relations following the election of Netanyahu and his expected establishment of an "extremist rightwing" government in

JERUSALEM 00000322 002 OF 002

Israel.

An Al Quds' inside report reveals that the Palestinian security services released dozens of Hamas prisoners in the West Bank on February 24.

Al Quds' front page reports that Israeli forces stormed the Nablus old city and arrested a number of Palestinians in different West Bank areas on February 24. The report adds that Israeli troops forced Palestinians, in Nablus, to leave their homes at gun point, carried out searches and took over a local Palestinian TV station, Asia TV, which was used as a monitoring tower for several hours.-----

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al Quds editorial is titled, "Dialogue for reconciliation not for dialogue's sake"(02/25): "In order for dialogue to succeed...there is a need to return to a brotherly atmosphere and united national feeling... everyone should understand that national unity is the bastion to protect Palestinian independence and that the continuation of the current fragmented situation is a recipe for more catastrophes."

WALLES